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## FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF CONGRESS.

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IMAGINE a medium sized man in clerical cut clothes, and a dark grayish beard. His sightless eyes are cast upwards, and in a melodious voice and well measured accents he is delivering the morning prayer to the House. To me there is something indescribably solemn in this blind man's exhortation. Congressmen are not proverbial for their reverence, but their attention at prayers is always respectful, and compares favorably with that of Senators at the other end of the Capitol.

Indeed there is only one Senator, I understand, who makes a rule of always being on hand at prayers, and the president of that august body has grown so accustomed to the absence of the rest that instead of calling upon them as a whole, he simply expresses the hope that the Senator from that particular State "will please come to order." Be this as it may, the anecdote has given time for the prayer of our chaplain to draw to a close. The Speaker's gavel descends with a sharp rap that breaks the spell, and a moment after the clerk is reading, in a hard prosaic voice, the doings of the previous day. This concluded, the reports of committees are made, and this in turn over, the House settles down to business. Do I say "settles down," rather startles up into life. What a hub-bub it is! To the novice it appears the very realization of the Anarch's dream; but gradually, as he watches, studies and observes, he gets hold of the end of the skein and undoes the snarl.

Then he begins to appreciate what a wonderful machine the organism of the House is. I say machine, for it is literally a machine. A machine in the highest acceptation of the word, and the noise is but the gyrations and the revolutions of its numberless wheels.

To be anything here you must be part of this machinery: the big wheels being the Chairmen of the prominent committees and making in their revolutions the most noise; the little wheels making not quite so much, but still making quite sufficient. Like all ma-

chines, too, this is cruel. A new member gets up to air his eloquence because he has not yet had time to become a part of the cosmos of the House, to fit himself into its wonderful system; the machine falls upon him, crushes him, rolls him out flat and throwing him to one side goes on in its heartless, pitiless regularity as before. For this reason the career of a Randolph Churchill would be a matter of absolute impossibility here, and if you will search the records you will find that not a solitary member has made during his first term quite the mark that precocious young man did in Parliament. In short there is less jumping into sudden prominence with us, and though there are brilliant exceptions to this, as in the cases of Mr. Cockran, Mr. Cummings, Mr. Lodge and Mr. Raynor, in a general way distinction in the House is usefulness in the House, and this usefulness can alone be purchased by a long apprenticeship.

The rules of the House encompass you and embarrass you as a net which only gradually and slowly falls away from about your limbs.

Nevertheless new members are apt to think that they know these rules; they have read them up of course, and probably have learnt them by heart. Three months afterwards it gradually dawns upon them that they are as ignorant of their practical application as they are of the characters of the Chinese grammar. Four years later, if sufficiently fortunate to be occasionally called to the Chair, they may occasionally be detected earnestly conferring as to some vexed question of order with the journal clerk, whose advice, if they are sensible, they will be quick to take and to express accordingly.

The last journal clerk used to be of invaluable assistance to a new chairman. He was the arbiter of arbiters on any matter of House regulation when all other arbiters have failed. In a sense Harry Smith was and might even be now considered the very center of the hub of our political system, for he has codified the rules that govern the most important branch of the law-making power of the United States.

What is the use of these rules? To facilitate the business of law making? No, decidedly not. Then it is to prevent legislation. Well, I will not go quite so far as to assert that. Their purpose rather is to prevent hasty legislation, and they are resorted to by the minority to protect themselves.

Notice how magnificently the leader on the wrong side of the House employs them. Notice how by means of them he often makes the wrong come right. I must confess I am a great admirer of this gentleman from Maine, in all but his political principles. As regards his qualities of a speaker, I have heard far more eloquent men and far more brilliant men, but never one who spoke more to the point. You are always sure that he is dead wrong, but he makes you think at the moment that he is dead right, for he not only has the talent of knowing just what to say, but the genius of knowing just when to leave off. A somewhat harsh, rasping voice, it stills in a moment the buzz of conversation, penetrating the confused din the way a keen-edged wind will do a fog. His very personality assists his leadership. Heavy and yet not pompous he stands during a debate with head cocked on one side, always attentive. Coming down the aisle, now to the rescue of one of his weaker followers, now to the attack of one of his staunchest adversaries, he is a tower of strength, to which all his party cling. Notice his generalship on the subject of the Speaker's contested seat. See how skillfully he threw the Democrats into the false position of appearing to try to keep "an honest son of toil" out of his rights. Not a man of the Republicans but knew that Carlisle was duly elected; not a man of them but recognized his fairness as a Speaker and felt besides a sincere sympathy for him in his illness; but by a skillful series of manœuvres these sentimental considerations were avoided and the onus of responsibility thrown on the Committee of Elections.

I shall never forget that day, and particularly when it was decided that the contestant should be heard in his own defense. Up to now Thoebe had been an abstraction, but suddenly he rose from among our very midst, where he had been quietly seated unbeknown to us. "That's Theobe; there he is," and every eye was directed to a medium-sized man standing behind a desk. There was something of the *coup de theatre* in the abruptness of his appearance, but I must allow I was rather taken with his looks. An earnest face it seemed to me, as I saw it in profile; a rather low forehead, a slightly turned up nose and a very long goatee like a three-inch stick depending from the end of his chin. Yet it was a sad, care-worn face, a face that never smiled. His black frock coat was buttoned at the last button, and he frequently used his handkerchief to press it to his lips.

His speech, however, was disappointing. With all due allowance for the difficulty of addressing such an assemblage for the first time—as critical, exacting an audience as perhaps exists in the world—his defense hardly came up to what his looks had led us to hope. It was disconnected and rambling, and this could hardly be excused by embarrassment, since he appeared perfectly cool and self-possessed. Nevertheless, he was every now and then vociferously applauded, even by the Democrats, particularly when I think from a slip of the tongue he said, “that he did not consider it much of an honor to be elected to this House.”

Equally with the gentleman from Maine the gentleman from Pennsylvania always attracts the attention of a new member, for equally when he speaks a hush falls over Congress. It is the silent homage the House pays, and it pays it conspicuously to these two men. Both these men inspire confidence in their followers, if not enthusiasm. Comparing them together, I should say the one is a great debater, the other a forcible speaker. The one always having *the* word, the other sometimes laboring for *a* word. But this very struggle for utterance, for phraseology, carries with it its own peculiar force, for a crowded brain, as a crowded church, emits its inmates slowly. Vigor, power is in Randall's face, in the nervous twitching of the eyes and mouth (as if about to smile, but that so often do not smile); in the very movement of the shoulders, and still more so in the index finger now pointed outwards, or again as it is raised to the spectacles to lift them up to the forehead from off the eyes. A great, strong, powerful intellect is in this man's head, relieved by a subtle smile that comes at last, and at the least expected moment, to light up the sombre face. And yet he can speak fervently at times. What a meaning there was in his remarks, deeper and truer than mere flowers of rhetoric could convey, when a few weeks ago, in behalf of Congress, he accepted the pictures that Massachusetts had presented of her distinguished speakers. How forcibly he spoke the cares of public men, their responsibilities, their oft unrecompensed labors, and the scantiness of their reward.

Earnest as was his address, however, it offered a striking contrast in style and phraseology to that of Mr. Breckenridge, of Kentucky, who seconded the motion. With a voice as silvery as the silver of his own gray hair he fairly thrilled his hearers, and, passing through all grades of eloquence, he rose to a climax of

oratory at the close that I have never heard equaled, save by Mr. Cockran in his magnificent defense of Mr. White. Alas, the style of Mr. Breckenridge is one that passes away. Everything beautiful is being superseded for the useful, and, fools that we are, we fail to perceive that mere beauty has its purpose. His eloquence is the eloquence of the South, before modern Sheffield and Birmingham came to crush it with their iron wheels. But hurried as the world is, busy as is Congress, it will always make time to listen to the gentleman from Kentucky, and to recognize in him the genial, the graceful, the Prince Charming of Debate.

Of the leader of the Democratic side, I have had fewer opportunities of judging, for, owing to the overwhelming nature of his committee work, he has been heard but seldom lately on the floor of the House. On the few occasions he has spoken, however, he struck me as a quick, generous, and impulsive man, strikingly handsome, and of a cast of features and carriage reminding one strongly of a *beau sabreur*—a man to head a victorious column, or to lead a forlorn hope in a desperate assault.

Mr. Cox, of New York, too, is a most distinguished speaker. He shines and sparkles, scintillates and shines. Every subject he touches turns to sunshine, and there is a warm spot in every new member's heart for him. May his "sun" never "set."

How well I remember the first speech I ever heard in these classic halls. It was just after my election, and consequently during the short session of the Forty-ninth Congress. The orator was well under way as I entered, and such impassioned fervor as his I never witnessed. Not confining himself to rhetoric, he displayed a physical energy that fairly fascinated me, for his arms and hands were going like the arms of a windmill. I was surprised to notice, however, that in spite of it all no one was paying the slightest heed to him. The gentleman in front of him was gracefully reposing with his feet upon his desk. His immediate neighbor was reading the New York *Herald*, his friend on the right was munching an apple, while the attention of the whole House was as little occupied with the speaker as if he were a fly buzzing in the northeast corner of the ceiling.

I was surprised at this; I was pained. It argued ill for my own career, since I was perfectly well convinced I could never get up a tithe of the steam this gentleman did. I must have shown my feelings on my countenance, too, for he caught my eye and held it

like a drowning man a straw. From that moment he addressed his remarks solely to me. He even advanced upon me, increasing the vehemence of his gestures as he did so. I forget now the subject of his discourse ; but I think it had to do with removing the tariff off peanuts. At any rate he was terrible in his earnestness, and his long locks rose and fell in sympathetic harmony with his gestures.

It was extremely embarrassing, however, to be thus singled out on my very first appearance, too ; and at last to break the horrid spell he exercised upon me, I ducked behind the screen that circles the chamber. When I gained a safe retreat, I turned to an official who had considerably been acting as my guide. On expressing to him my astonishment that such animated oratory had met with such scant recognition, he smiled condescendingly ; then as we passed out : “ You won’t be here long,” he explained colloquially, “ before you find that they’ll be foaming at the mouth, and not a quarter of those on the floor will even know they’re in town.”

As regards speaking, or at least the first attempts at speaking by new men, I am reminded of a good story told in my hearing by a distinguished member of the British House of Commons. He had previously served as mayor of a large city and came to Parliament with a great reputation for oratory. On the eve of his maiden effort in the House he was approached by an elderly colleague, who, after explaining that every legislative body had its own little weaknesses, described that of Parliament to be a petty jealousy of reputations earned outside its own halls. “ I know it’s very trivial and absurd,” went on the monitor, “ but if you could only recognize this little prejudice and *just break down in your speech*, they’d feel very kindly towards you, and you’d gain, by it later.” Whether the same “ little prejudices ” have weight here I cannot say ; but of this I am assured, namely, that a few days spent in Congress before taking one’s seat are of great utility to the budding statesman. Not that he learns much, but he learns this most useful lesson—how little he does know. He gets permeated with the atmosphere of legislation, and there is just that much less for him to have to absorb when he comes up a full-fledged Congressman. There are fewer demands upon his time, and he has consequently the opportunity to study the workings of things and the men he will subsequently encounter. Some of

these men, however, he will not meet again, for members have been known to fail of re-election. Indeed, the present House has lost two noteworthy men in General Bragg and Colonel Hepburn. I remember them together, in connection with the Dependent Pension Bill.

What powers of debate they possessed : inspired invective in the one ; stern, relentless, pitiless logic of retort in the other. General Bragg, in showing that he had the right to represent the soldier, sketched in glowing terms his own brilliant career, closing with a graphic picture of how, when he reviewed his troops, the cheer would be caught up from man to man, and the word roll down the lines that General Bragg was riding by.

"Yes," answered Colonel Hepburn, "and there was a time when Benedict Arnold rode down the line and received the well merited cheers of his men. Years after his desertion he met a former comrade in arms on British soil, and asked him what would be his (Benedict Arnold's) fate should he ever venture to return to America. 'Would the wound that I received at Saratoga in my leg save my life?' The reply was this : 'If we ever caught you on American soil, we would cut off the leg you so gloriously had wounded at Saratoga and we would bury it with all the honors of war; but as for your carcass, if we could only get hold of that, we'd hang it on the highest gibbet we could find.'"

The records of the war speak in too eloquent language of General Bragg's career to require any protest from my pen at the calumny of linking merely his name with that of Benedict Arnold.

But, how I am running on or rather running back. I began with the present Congress and here I am sticking at the Fortyninth. Even as I write (for I am writing at my desk) a gentleman is "up." "Mr. Speaker," he is saying : "Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn." Then a vote is taken, next a division is demanded, and finally, if he has the requisite number of votes behind him, the ayes and noes are called. To call the ayes and noes consumes exactly thirty-six minutes. After the motion to adjourn has been voted down, he repeats the motion in a slightly different form, and the whole process is gone over again and very likely a third and even a fourth time. This is what is called "filibustering," and the gentleman employs these tactics quite legitimately to retard consideration of some bill he does not approve of.

The last and most extraordinary case of filibustering is that

of the now famous deadlock. What excitement reigned when it first dawned upon us that the "Direct Tax bill" was to produce a night session, but how little we dreamed that the now memorable "4th" was to extend into a week. At the demand for a call of the House the great dome of the capital flashes with electric fire, and members hurriedly come flocking back. By midnight the House has assumed the appearance of a battle ground, with gentlemen stretched lifeless here and there over the seats and ottomans, vainly seeking rest. Every now and then the sergeant-at-arms would haul up before the bar of the House a "prisoner," and we would all rise up in a sort of general resurrection to chaff him—voting to fine him five thousand dollars, perhaps, asking who gave him his *bouttonniere*, and remarking generally upon the attractiveness of "her society."

Sometimes the haul would consist of several gentlemen, and they would stand there like great recalcitrant school-boys caught playing truant. The most puzzling part of the whole performance was to know alongside of whom you would find yourself in the morning; thus you would take a place next to a Democrat and wake up alongside of a Republican. A good joke was played upon me the last night of the deadlock. I was sleeping in the lobby, and during my restless slumbers in some manner kicked off one of my boots. On being suddenly called, I slipped on what I supposed was my own shoe, for it was lying alongside of me, and rushed on to the floor to vote. As I gradually regained my senses I became aware of the fact that I was wearing the property of some one else, and was only given a cue by noticing a gentleman hopping about the floor on one foot in all the agony of a tight fit. It seems that he too had kicked off his shoe on retiring to a couch, and this being facetiously changed for mine, he had pulled it on in his hurried awakening. But the deadlock has been too fully discussed to warrant more than these brief references from me. We broke it by a small majority to adjourn.

An amusing illustration of how one is occasionally obliged to rely on others in questions one has had no time to consider appeared the other day in a Washington paper. Mr. A. approaches Mr. B. and inquires why he voted on a certain question in the affirmative. "I voted aye," was the answer, "because I saw Mr. C. vote aye, and I voted as he did because Mr. C. closely resembles my old Colonel in the war."

"That's an odd reason," the first speaker replied, somewhat puzzled.

"Not so odd as it might seem," was the retort. "I followed my old Colonel for four years, and he never led me during all that time into a single dangerous position."

The curious manner in which a majority will be had on a rising vote, and this majority melt into a minority when it comes to having one's vote recorded, was amusingly illustrated the other day, when the matter was under discussion of providing each member with a clerk. Practically Congress is becoming an unpaid Parliament. Of course, a man can live on his salary, and live well on it, but he can hardly afford to hire a clerk and meet all such demands on his purse as are necessary to be met if he contemplates a continuation in public life. To begin with, the mail of an average Congressman will mount up to forty letters a day, and if he answers all these in his own hand, he has just so much less time and energy to expend on his parliamentary duties. The Senate, with one-third the labor demanded of each member, had set the precedent of voting themselves such assistance; but somehow, when it came to having one's name recorded in black and white, the Republican phalanx in the House, which had been energetically supporting the measure, flopped around, and, making of necessity a virtue, voted against the proposal. Of course, we were all hugely disappointed, for we had expected the Republicans to pull the coveted chestnuts for us from the fire. They were too sharp. "I would rather be in the Fiftieth Congress without a clerk," said a gentleman who viewed the matter from a practical standpoint, "than see my successor enjoying the services of one in the Fifty-first." Probably he voiced the sentiment of the majority.

Leaving aside the question of one's correspondence, the attendance at the House is long and fatiguing, beginning, if you include committees, at ten and lasting often till past six. In addition, there are occasional night sessions, and certainly an average of four sub-committee meetings per week. These, combined with the preparation of reports and of speeches, visits to the different departments, and efforts to secure places for your constituents, make just thirty-four hours work for the twenty-four. How do you do it then? We don't do it; but the hardest thing to learn is what you can safest leave undone.

An old war-horse can tell to a nicety even when his presence in the House is required. "Is Mr. B. in his seat?" some one is said to have once inquired of a doorkeeper. "Certainly," answered the official. "But how do you know, you haven't looked." "I don't need to look," was the cynical reply, "for this is Mr. B.'s first term."

The continued presentation of cards, too, keep you in a lively state of distractedness. People send in for you on every conceivable pretext, and they always time their visits at the exact moment when you are most particularly engaged. "Three ladies in the waiting room and a constituent at each door," exclaims a neighbor of mine, pulling his hair in despair, and he goes on with a letter acknowledging a consignment of hay to be sold in Washington for a country neighbor, and this done amiably writes his autograph in the book of a page.

Sometimes people call you out to talk over their pension cases, and their tales would melt a heart of adamant.

One of the most touching is that of a man who seeks support from an ungrateful government because of having fallen from a tree during the war while picking cherries; that of another for having contracted rheumatism by sitting down on a cold, icy stone.

All these claims are listened to with deep sympathy and bills in many cases drawn up for their relief. And all the time you are being called upon to sign petitions, to put your name in autograph books and to answer questions you know nothing about; to see that you don't vote aye when you ought to vote no, and your ears ringing the while with the reading of bills, the calls of committees and the oft repeated expression "Mr. Speaker, I object," or "I want to say just here—" "The third reading and engrossment of the bill"—"Those in favor of," etc., etc., expressions that rise superior to the general buzz of conversation and unite in producing the noise of a vast factory, which is exactly what Congress is—a vast factory for the turning out of laws.

LLOYD S. BRYCE.